



September 28, 2006

TO: California Biodiversity Council Members

FROM: Mike Chrisman and Mike Pool, Co-Chairs

SUBJECT: PROPOSAL TO CREATE A BINATIONAL COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Early this year, our Executive Committee assembled a team of CBC staff members to work with local interests in San Diego and Baja California to organize today's meeting and yesterday's field trip. The team consisted of representatives from state and federal agencies, local government, and a variety of other interests in the region, including government officials from Mexico. As always, we asked our staff to identify a number of actions that we might consider at this meeting. We are pleased to announce that we have a very important proposal for you to consider today. The proposal is to form a new "Biodiversity Along the Border Committee" that would consist of CBC member agencies, officials from Mexico, and other important partners. The goal for this committee would be to work together to identify specific recommendations for improving the cross-border issues and programs that we learned about today.

The CBC and the State of California are committed to maintaining good relationships and fostering economic, educational, environmental protection, and natural resource conservation goals with the State of Baja California. To that end, our staff developed the field trip, and today's presentations to showcase cooperative efforts underway and opportunities to develop strategies and complementary policies for habitat conservation and natural resource protection along the border.

To date, the State of California has developed a working relationship with the State of Baja California (and the cities of Tijuana and Tecate) on several environmental projects along the border, but we have not coordinated on issues of conservation and biodiversity. Recognizing that a coordinated approach to managing natural resources between the two states requires frequent dialogue, we are proposing that the CBC create a binational committee to explore the feasibility of implementing the proposed actions that are summarized below.

ACTION ITEM. We are proposing that this new “Biodiversity Along the Border Committee” include staff representatives from the following CBC member agencies: California Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Parks and Recreation, California State Coastal Conservancy, US Forest Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, State Water Resources Control Board, Integrated Waste Management Board, and SANDAG. Other CBC members are welcome to participate if they see a role for themselves.

To assure the success of the committee, non-CBC members with specific expertise and interests will be asked to join the committee. These members would include government agencies such as US Department of Homeland Security, International Boundary and Water Commission, and the City and County of San Diego; and non-governmental organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the International Community Foundation.

The committee would work with the appropriate federal, state, and local authorities in Baja California. It is recommended that the committee form three subcommittees to explore the following projects:

1. Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative
2. Conservation Easements
3. Tijuana River Valley Management
 - a. Tijuana River Sediment Basins
 - b. Los Laureles Sewerage System
 - c. Tires and Trash Action Plan

1. Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative

Las Californias, the border region of California and Baja California, lies at the center of one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. It is also a growing metropolitan area of more than 5 million people, where the human footprint severely challenges the integrity and functionality of ecosystems. However, institutional and political constraints to a binational conservation effort are a challenge, due to differences in land ownership and conservation patterns between the two countries, legal mechanisms, and available financial resources for achieving land conservation.

This subcommittee would be responsible for studying and analyzing the recommendations set forth in the *Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative* for future action, as well as explore the feasibility of adopting resolutions with the appropriate city, state, and/or federal agencies in Mexico to work in cooperation and look for opportunities to protect Las Californias resources.

2. Conservation Easements

In 2002, the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR) and the XVII Tijuana City Council signed an MOU regarding their desire to cooperate in various joint actions to create conservation easements in an attempt to reduce environmental impacts on the TRNERR. The current municipal administration in Tijuana has been dedicated to working with the TRNERR to address these impacts. Examples of joint projects include: bi-national initiatives in erosion control and storm water management in Los Laureles Canyon, the City of Tijuana's Los Laureles Canyon Master Plan 2007-2015, the Wetland Avenger's Event at Los Sauces Canyon and Border Field State Park, the sustainable model home project with the Universidad Iberoamericana de Tijuana, and changes in city ordinances regarding alternative approaches to flood control and storm water management.

This subcommittee would review the existing MOU for opportunities to further existing initiatives and explore the feasibility of establishing conservation easements in canyons lying adjacent to the TRNERR in Mexico, namely Los Laureles/Goat Canyon, Matadero Canyon/Smuggler's Gulch, and Los Sauces/Yogurt Canyon.

3a. Tijuana River Sediment Basins

Matadero Canyon/Smugglers Gulch is regularly impacted by alluvial sediments and pollutants transported by storm water from Mexico. These flows lead to diminished wetland habitat at the internationally recognized Tijuana River Estuary and flooding at Border Field State Park. Matadero Canyon abuts park property managed by the County of San Diego. Los Laureles Canyon/Goat Canyon, Las Sauces Canyon/Yogurt Canyon, and the main channel of the Tijuana River all have similar problems.

This subcommittee would work with the City of Tijuana to develop a plan to build sediment basins in the Tijuana River Watershed.

As well, the subcommittee would prepare a grant proposal (due November 27, 2006) to the U.S.-Mexico Border 2012 Program for 2007 Project Funding. The proposal will address the funding needs of sediment basins, as well the funding needs of the two projects discussed below - a condominium sewerage system pilot project for Los Laureles Canyon, and measures to limit and manage trash accumulations in the Tijuana River Valley. There may be other grant opportunities that should be pursued by the subcommittee, including those available through the California Integrated Waste Management Board and the international boundary and Water Commission.

3b. Los Laureles Sewerage System

Many of the ecological problems faced by the TRNERR originate in the bi-national Tijuana River Watershed, three-quarters of which is in Mexico. The TRNERR has no

formal authority to influence land use beyond its boundaries. Due to limited resources, upstream factors in Mexico (unplanned urbanization, erosion, pollution, etc.) generate serious effects on downstream reserve resources. In partnership with the State Coastal Conservancy, the International Community Foundation, the City of Tijuana and non-profit organizations in Mexico, the TRNERR has established a pilot project in the upper reaches of Los Laureles Canyon that demonstrates how a neighborhood can be redeveloped, at low cost, to become environmentally sensitive and sustainable. A significant missing piece in this demonstration project is sewer treatment. A lack of basic sewage infrastructure in rapidly urbanizing areas such as Los Laureles Canyon will continue to generate serious effects on downstream reserve resources.

The subcommittee would develop a proposal to fund a condominial sewerage pilot project. In a condominial sewer system, the community (the condominial) maintains an intermediate network that links their houses to the main trunk sewer system through one communal connection. Instead of being laid under roads, using conventional trenching and pipe materials, the network is laid through people's properties, or on footpaths between them. Each household pays for the length of a small diameter pipe connecting their house to the condominial network. This method has proven successful in many poor and low income communities throughout the world, including Brazil, Switzerland, and South Africa.

This can lead to a larger scale project for other areas within the City of Tijuana, and improved environmental health downstream at the TRNERR. Condominial systems can meet the challenge of providing full service in cases where a shortage of resources and the use of inadequate technologies have kept basic sanitation services out of the reach of most of the population.

3c. Tires and Trash Action Plan

Tire and trash accumulation is severe and is threatening natural resources throughout the Tijuana River Valley. Last year, over 4,000 tires were collected at the mouth of Goat Canyon, located in the TRNERR.

The subcommittee would form an action plan and a financing plan to address:

- Alternate slope stabilization measures in Mexico.
- Improving trash collection and tire disposal measures in Mexico.
- Developing mechanisms for cleaning trash and tires so that they can be recycled.
- Developing measures for limiting the spread of trash as it reaches the Tijuana Estuary, making it easier to collect.

As mentioned above, funding for this project will be requested through the Border 2012 Program. Other options include funding through the California Integrated Waste Management Board.